

"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life..." (2 Pet. 1.3a). This verse is the opening address of Peter's letter. Peter begins by rooting our lives in the divine power, grace, and calling of Jesus Christ. The divine power, theias dynamēōs, is that which fuels all of our pursuits of a Godly life. And it is this divine power that is everything we need for life and godliness. The power to live the life intended by God does not reside within us but in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

We are going to look at the story of King Josiah, which you will find in 2 Chronicles 34. I want to give you a bit of context of where we find ourselves in the story of God's people. The account of Josiah's reform of the Southern Kingdom of Judah comes right at the end of a tragic and swift decline of Israel under the rule of various horrible Kings. The downward turn of Israel is so severe that following the rule of Josiah, Egypt and Babylon come in and install a few puppet kings and will eventually impose on the entire nation a humiliating and debilitating exile.

Josiah is an amazing king, one of the few good kings in the history of Israel. There are 39 Kings recorded in the Bible, 19 up in the North and 20 in the South. Josiah is one of only eight who is considered good. He is the last good king and one of the last kings before the coming exile.

"Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for thirty-one years. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and followed the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left." - 2 Chron. 34:1-2

So, Josiah is thrust to the throne when he is just eight years old. The reason he becomes king at age eight is because of his family history. I want to back up briefly and look at the kings who reigned before Josiah.

The narrator uses three criteria to judge the goodness of a particular king.

1. Did they worship the God of Israel alone?
2. Did they rid Israel of all idolatry?
3. Did they remain faithful to the covenant?

According to these criteria, the narrator finds zero kings in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) that are classified as good - 0 for 20 in the Northern Kingdom. They find eight kings in the Southern Kingdom (Judah) that are classified as good - 8 for 20 in the

Southern Kingdom. Josiah is one of the eight good kings and stands in strong contrast to his direct familial line.

Manasseh and Amon

Josiah follows in the succession of his family's line for the throne. His grandpa was Manasseh. Manasseh reigned for 55 years and is largely considered the evillest king in the history of Israel.

"Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for fifty-five years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites." - 2 Chron. 33:1-2

Amon (Josiah's Father) reigned for two years and continued the evil traditions of his father, Manasseh.

"Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for two years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done." - 2 Chron. 33:21-22

For 57 years, this family perpetuated evil throughout the nation of Israel. The evil was so bad that Amon's men ended up assassinating him in the palace, because of how atrocious his reign was. Amon was not simply swimming in the same direction as the world but was actively moving in the direction of evil. He practiced child sacrifice, pagan worship, divination, and the like. And it is this vacancy of the throne, created by Amon's men taking him out, that forces Josiah to take power. Imagine a 1st grader with this position of power and authority.

"He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and followed the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left." 2 Chron. 34:2

Notice what distinguishes Josiah from the spiritual state he inherited from his dad and grandfather. Instead of following their steps, he does what is right in the eyes of the Lord. And then the author draws a direct connection to the great King David. He does not draw attention to Amnon or Manasseh, but all the way back to David. Then the author goes further by invoking a phrase with great depth, "not turning aside to the right or to the left." This is the idea that he never departed from the word of God. It was his bedrock, his foundation.

Josiah is, by and large, a massive success because of his piety and commitment to the things of God. He is undoubtedly one of the greatest kings in the history of Israel. And as you look back at the

line of David, you can easily draw the connections from David to Josiah to eventually Jesus. Look at the text that describes Josiah and consider how it is a description that anyone would love to have said about themselves.

“Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did - with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.” - 2 Kings 23:25

This is significant and high praise for Josiah. So hopefully the question you begin to ask is, what did Josiah do to garner such high praise? Let's take a quick look at the story of Josiah, but to do so, I want to turn to 2 Kings 22, where we find the exact same story recorded.

The Reforms of Josiah

Repairs the Temple - 2 Kings 22:3-7

In the eighteenth year of his reign at age 26, Josiah decides to repair the temple that has been trampled on and destroyed for the last six decades under the rule of his grandfather and his father. For 60 years his family trashed the sacred place. He said, *“...And make these men pay the workers who repair the temple of the Lord...”* (2 Kings 22:5b).

So, Josiah comes across some money and diligently pursues the repairs the Temple. For so many years the temple had become a house of pagan worship and idolatry, but Josiah says, “No more!” He is going to repair the temple, and it will be a house of worship to Yahweh. This is the beginning of his legacy.

Discovers the Law - 2 Kings 22:8-20

The second thing he does is discover the Law.

“Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, ‘I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the Lord.’ He gave it to Shaphan, who read it.” v. 22:8

Apparently, while they were fixing the temple, they came across the Old Testament, the Torah. No one had bothered to read it for nearly six decades, and only when they are cleaning out the Temple do they find it. Now look what happens when Josiah hears the word out of the book of the Law in verse 11. *“When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes”* (v. 22:11).

Upon hearing the word of God for the first time in 60 years, he is broken. He is crushed at how far himself and his nation have fallen from the vision of God. So, he tears his robes, which is verbiage used to describe the act of repentance. He weeps, he mourns, he is moved to his core. He is distraught at the way that they had not followed the Lord. It is through this discovery of the book of the Law that Josiah is able to know God at another level.

Renews the Covenant - 2 Kings 23:1-3

Josiah is transformed by the word of God, and then he transforms the nation. He gathers all of the inhabitants of Judah and Israel, and he reads the entire law to his people. He opens up the Bible and reads that which has not been read for over 60 years. And after that point, he draws a line in the sand and says, “This is not how it is going to be anymore,” and renews the covenant with God.

“The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord - to follow the Lord and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.” - 2 Kings 23:3

Josiah repents and leads the people to repentance. They see a humble and submissive man, which leads the nation into a renewal of the covenant.

Reforms the Nation - 2 Kings 23:4-20

Josiah orders the removal and desecration of all articles of clothing, altars, or whatever it is that is used to worship pagan gods.

v. 5 - “He did away with the idolatrous priest...”

v. 6 - “He took the Asherah Pole from the temple...”

v. 7 - “He also tore down the quarters...” of those defiling the temple

v. 10 - “He desecrated Topheth” so they could not sacrifice their children to the god Molek

v. 12 - “He pulled down the altars...” to the false gods previous kings erected.

v. 15 - “Even the altar at Bethel, the high place made by Jeroboam son of Neat, who had caused Israel to sin - even that altar and high place he demolished.” - this had been there for 300 years

v. 19 - “...Josiah removed all the shrines at the high places...that had aroused the Lord's anger.”

This was all on the initiative of Josiah; it is a decision he made alone to bring the reform to the nation in order to bring the people back to the way of God.

Reinstitute the Passover - 2 Kings 23:21-23

Josiah then calls all the people of the Kingdom together to celebrate the Passover in the way that the book of the Law describes. *“Celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant...”* (2 Kings 23:21).

Josiah brings together a communal celebration to make this a national festivity. Who wouldn't want a legacy like this? Josiah transforms and completely redirects the entire trajectory of this nation. It is stunning what Josiah was able to do during his reign. But this isn't the point of the story I want to share. It isn't

about his accomplishments, but it is about what Josiah was able to do to become this kind of King who is able to transform his Kingdom.

Josiah's Knowledge of and Pursuit of God (2 Chronicles 34)

What is it that made this man great? What gave him the fortitude and trust in the Lord to push through all of that which would stand in the way to become the kind of King who would bring the reforms he brought. Now, 2 Chronicles is the exact same story as what we find in 2 Kings. It is written by a different author and chooses to highlight various sections. And it is here in Chronicles that Ezra, author of Chronicles, makes note of something we didn't see in the account in Kings. It sheds light into what it was that distinguished Josiah from the others.

"In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David. In his twelfth year he began..." – 2 Chronicles 34:3

May I suggest that this half verse is the bedrock on which all of Josiah's accomplishments are built. It is here we find the foundation of the kind of man Josiah became. Everything we see built in Josiah's life is built upon this particular choice to, "seek the God of his father David." This is the eighth year of his reign, which he started at age eight, making him 16 years old. From the age of 16 to the age of 20, Josiah makes an intentional choice to do one thing and one thing only, "seek God." No other accomplishments are mentioned, no other tasks are noteworthy to mention, simply Josiah seeking God. And this is what sets Josiah above the other kings, a dedication from an early age in the pursuit of God. Before he does any external accomplishments, he chooses to seek transformation internally through the pursuit of God.

Now, this is the verse we looked at in the beginning of this message. Let's look at it with full context.

"Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these, he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." 2 Pet. 1:2-4

It is not a simple passivity of God's divine power, but it is his divine power "through our knowledge of him..." that we have all we need. This is the knowledge we see Josiah pursuing for the four years before his works began. One of the things we have to overcome when we see this concept is that our idea of knowledge is different from the Greek understanding of knowledge. It is not merely head knowledge but moves beyond that. The Greek word used here is *epignosis*. This carries a depth of knowledge

that comes from a deep abiding personal relationship. It is less the ability to recite facts about the person or know a lot about them, but rather it is a deep knowing of them. A deep connection to who they are.

To know God is to change the world.

For Josiah, his personal piety, his personal devotion to God led to a life centered around action. It was in his intentional and focused pursuit of God in the early years of his life that formed him into the kind of king that would be capable of leading the Kingdom into the depth of reform he led them into. And the results were profound.

Don't be mistaken, this all happens in the quiet. I want to close by pointing out three things of note in Josiah's pursuit of the knowledge of God. Here are three intentional decisions we see Josiah make that gives shape to his life.

Personal Responsibility for Growing in Knowledge

The word "began" in 2 Chronicles 34:3 has the idea of starting a sort of pilgrimage toward greater depth. To seek God means to inquire and search. It is a posture of activity, not passivity. For so many of us, we assume the spiritual life is one of passivity. Just show up for church for decades and eventually you become Mother Teresa or something. But in reality, we must, like Josiah, take personal responsibility for growing in the intimate knowledge of God. This is not a onetime thing. It is the perpetual and continuous lonely work of pursuing the things of God in the quiet and slow of mundane everyday life. It is what Eugene Peterson called, "a long obedience in the same direction." The world we live in refuses to move slow, but so much of what it means to follow Jesus is done in the slow years, decades, and lifetime pursuit of God. Josiah refuses to take the route his grandfather and father took before him but takes responsibility for his own knowledge of God.

Finding Knowledge in Obscurity

Imagine having the power that Josiah had at age eight or even at age 16! Could you imagine having all of that and then choosing, like Josiah, to do nothing with it. He sets it aside in order to grow in the depth of his knowledge and intimacy with God. Josiah recognizes something about God. Before people do anything great for God, there is a period of silence. God takes them away and does a work in their life before you see any great acts of service. Paul was in Arabia for three years prior to his ministry. Joseph spent 13 years as a slave before he worked in the upper courts. This idea of obscurity runs contrary to everything we know about our world today. But Josiah makes the intentional decision to live in obscurity for four years before we see him do his entire life's work.

The Path of Greatest Resistance

When Josiah says it's time to start, and when he begins to reform the nation, he doesn't take the easy route but treads into the deepest route of pain. Again, consider the spiritual state of the kingdom when Josiah takes command. For 60 years they worshipped pagan gods, desecrated the temple, and was as evil as evil gets. And it would have been easy for Josiah to be loved and popular if he simply swam with the stream, but he didn't. It was difficult and unpopular, but he chooses to do it anyway. He chooses the exact opposite of what his dad and grandfather did.

God told Josiah earlier that the coming exile would take place regardless of his influence. But Josiah still chooses to pursue the things of God. And ultimately this leads to what we see in 2 Chronicles 34:33.

“As long as he lived, they did not fail to follow the Lord, the God of their ancestors.” - 2 Chronicles 34:33

For 31 years, Josiah transformed the story of his kingdom. He led them in the pursuit of knowledge and the reform of the kingdom. And it all began with Josiah's intentional pursuit to do the lonely work of growing in the knowledge of God, and take up the courage to pursue God in a culture organized against the ways of God.

Church, may we take up the example of Josiah. May we seek the God of our ancestors. May we understand that God has given us all we need through the increasing knowledge of him; a deep, personal, and intimate knowledge of him. May we take up the long obedience in the same direction in the pursuit of understanding that it is in this lonely work, we can transform ourselves and those around us. This is the work we are called to, for our own sake and the sake of the Bay Area.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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